

THOMAS PINNEY: *The City of Vines: The History of Wine in Los Angeles*. Heyday, Berkeley, CA and California Historical Society, San Francisco, CA, 2017, 334 pp., ISBN 978159714398 (hardcover), \$35.00.

Boyle, Keller, Kohler, Mesnager, Naud, and Vignes are the names of streets in downtown Los Angeles. They are not far from Union Station, the Los Angeles River (now a concrete flood channel), or Highway 101. Their respective national origins are Irish, German, and French. Where did these names come from? As it turns out, they are all the names of major wine makers and grape growers, whose properties dominated commercial activity in Los Angeles in the late 19th century. Burbank, Azusa, Pomona, Glendale, Alhambra, and especially Pasadena all have street names associated with wine making, including even the names of grapes that were grown in these places (like Mataro, the Spanish for Mourvedre, in Pasadena).

Thomas Pinney, the author of the majestic two-volume *A History of Wine in America*, has turned his attention to the history of the wines of Los Angeles in an attempt to retrieve the reputation for grape growing and wine making that LA (as it is always called) has so thoroughly lost. As Pinney writes in the preface, “The most striking fact about the history of winemaking in Los Angeles, city and county, is the completeness with which it has been forgotten” (p. i). Pinney’s book has been taken to heart by a few people, and coupled with the locavore movement, has led to a tiny re-birth of wine making in Los Angeles. (Full disclosure: I own a small house in the Eagle Rock neighborhood of Los Angeles, and I have planted 48 cabernet sauvignon vines in my front yard.)

Wine in California starts, of course, with the Spanish colonists, who brought with them the clergy and their desire for wine. The history of this very early period is frustratingly poorly documented. It is known that grapes were cultivated, and wine was made in some quantity, but details are sparse, and this part of Pinney’s book is necessarily abbreviated. He concludes, based on work by Roy Brady, that 1782 was perhaps the first vintage of California wine, made from the Mission grape, and grown in Mission San Juan Capistrano from cuttings brought from Baja California. Until very recently, it was unknown precisely what the Mission grape is. Speculation suggested it was indigenous, as it did not seem to be cultivated in Europe. In fact, the advent of genetic testing has permitted the identification of the Mission grape as a Spanish variety, Listan Prieto, which is no longer cultivated in Europe.

As Pinney carefully explains, no one is certain about where the first commercial, as opposed to missionary, wines were produced in Los Angeles. However, a good case has been made that the Spanish land grant made to Jose Maria Verdugo in 1784, which now comprises the towns of Eagle Rock, Flintridge, Glendale, and La Canada, is probably the first commercial vineyard site in Los Angeles and, indeed, in California. Verdugo Road remains as the sole reminder that this 34,000 acre rancho was once a part of the Spanish Alta California.

From this early beginning in the 18th century, the Los Angeles wine industry grew dramatically over the 19th century. Pinney takes us through the remarkable cast of characters who were part of this growth, which expanded from Central Los Angeles into the San Gabriel Valley and beyond. By the late 19th century, things had begun to go awry. This seems to have been partly a result of excess and speculative planting—by 1890 Los Angeles City and County produced 1.3 million gallons of wine, about 10% of all California production, but had a population of only 50,000 people—partly a matter of population growth and the pressure on agricultural land, and partly a result of Pierce's Disease.

The story of Pierce's Disease is the story of a fabled German grape growing cooperative in Anaheim, California. Then a part of Los Angeles County, Anaheim now lies in Orange County and is perhaps, best known as the home of Disneyland. The plan was to set out 50 plots of 20 acres each, 8 acres of which were to be planted in grapes. The settlers paid \$750 each and were recruited from the German immigrant communities in San Francisco and Los Angeles. An unusual feature of the plan was that the surveying, irrigation arrangements, and vine planting would be accomplished by a work crew before the settlers arrived. This grand plan actually worked, and by 1859 the first settlers arrived to find streets, a park site, a town center of 40 acres, and 8,000 Mission grape vine cuttings planted on each plot of land. The first vintage of 2,000 gallons of wine was produced in 1860, and production grew rapidly to 300,000 gallons by 1863. By 1880 there were 60 winemakers in Anaheim, and the wines were being distributed in both San Francisco and New York.

Suddenly, in 1885 a mysterious disease appeared in the vineyards, and by 1890 all of the vines in the Anaheim region had died from an entirely unknown cause. Ultimately, the U.S. Department of Agriculture sent Newton B. Pierce to investigate this mysterious death of 25,000 acres of vines in the Anaheim area. Pierce's report, for whom Pierce's Disease was ultimately named, concluded that the disaster was unique and that there was no known remedy for it. He correctly hypothesized that the disease could be explained as the result of what we now call a bacterium if such bacterium disabled the normal physiological function of the plant. Although the cause has now been confirmed, it remains the case that there is no cure for the disease, and that shielding the vines from the leafhoppers that carry the bacteria is the only prevention of it.

The demise of the Anaheim settlement was not the end of grape growing and wine making in Los Angeles, which survived well into the 20th century in other parts of Los Angeles County, but in a continuously declining capacity.

Pinney has produced a fascinating and well-written book that is beautifully illustrated with documents from the Huntington Library collection and from the California Historical Society archives. It is not often that a history book can actually cause a change in history, but Pinney's book has caused a stir of activity that may bring wine making back to Los Angeles. Inspired in part by Pinney's book, the Angeleno Wine Company (<https://www.angelenowine.com>) has opened its doors on Spring Street in downtown Los Angeles, with a winery and tasting room that

provides wine made from local grapes in precisely the same area where the wine industry first started in California. The proprietors explain, “Our dream is to bring a culture of winemaking back to Los Angeles.”

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MONTY WALDIN: *Biodynamic Wine*. Infinite Ideas, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2016, 222 pp., ISBN: 978-1-908984-81-4 (paperback), \$31.88.

Biodynamics is an approach to agriculture that utilizes specific soil preparations, and coordinates crop production with celestial cycles, intending to combine the spiritual with the material and create a complete farm ecosystem, which includes the farmer and a relationship to the cosmos. The increased popularity of and focus on sustainability in many areas of production has driven a corresponding increase in organic and biodynamic production, particularly in wine. The author of this book, Monty Waldin, is a prominent media presence in the United Kingdom and Europe. As well as being a wine writer, critic, and consultant, having worked in various vineyard capacities for a number of years, he is also an authority on organic and biodynamic wine production. Waldin sees biodynamics as a sustainable approach to wine making, as well as a spiritual practice that ostensibly results in the added benefit of increased quality and expression of terroir.

In the Introduction, Waldin outlines the differences in approaches to grape growing, from traditional subsistence farming to industrial agriculture, organic and ecological. This is where the sustainability of each approach is discussed, and Waldin lays the framework for his argument that biodynamics is the most sustainable alternative. Waldin’s purpose is not just to describe the biodynamic process, which he does very well; it is also to draw attention to and increase support for what he believes to be the most sustainable form of wine production.

In Chapter 1, Waldin presents the origins of biodynamics, as based on the philosophical work of Rudolf Steiner. Steiner gave a series of lectures in 1924, shortly before his death, entitled “Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture.” Often called simply “The Agriculture Course,” between June 7 and 16, 1924, Steiner gave eight lectures and four discussion sessions in which he outlined an approach to agriculture based on “Anthroposophy,” the spiritual science. This perspective offers a “...view of life that includes both spirit and matter” (p. 4). Waldin weaves Steiner’s philosophy into his descriptions of how biodynamics works, using quotes and references from the 1924 Agriculture Course and Steiner’s own handwritten lecture notes. Throughout the book, Waldin integrates